DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 315 717 CG 022 310

AUTHOR Tucker, M. Belinda; Mitchell-Kernan, Claudia
TITLE Psychological Well-Being and Perceived Marital Opportunity.
PUB DATE 13 Aug 89
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association (97th, New Orleans, LA, August 11-15, 1989).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Anxiety; *Attitudes; *Blacks; Cultural Differences; Depression (Psychology); *Females; Latin Americans; Life Satisfaction; Loneliness; *Marriage; *Mate Selection; *Perception; Well Being; Whites
IDENTIFIERS *Mate Availability

ABSTRACT

The psychological consequences of limited marital opportunity have recently received attention. It has been argued that American women were facing a shortage of potential partners and that this situation was associated with a range of social phenomena, including changes in the value of marriage and family. This study examined the relationship between perceived marital opportunity and psychological well-being, as measured by depression, anxiety, loneliness, life satisfaction, and relationship satisfaction, using women's data from the 1989 Southern California Social Survey. Data from approximately 300 single women were included. Partial correlations between mate availability and well-being indicators, controlling for age, income, education, and value placed on marriage demonstrated that perceptions of mate availability were significantly and negatively correlated with well-being. A perceived lack of availability was associated with greater depression, anxiety, loneliness, and less satisfaction with life. The effect was strong and pervasive for Latino women and White women, but somewhat weak for Black women. Findings were interpreted as indicating that when the perception of mate availability was viewed as rooted and driven, the consequences for psychological well-being were negative. When mate availability was viewed as a systemic feature of the environment over which one had little control, mental health was not affected. (ABL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED315717

Psychological Well-Being and Perceived Marital Opportunity

M. Belinda Tucker and Claudia Mitchell-Kernan

University of California, Los Angeles

Presented at the 97th Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association at New Orleans, August 1989.

Presentation time: Sunday, August 13, 1989; 3:00-4:50 pm.

CG022310

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

M. Belinda Tucker

Claudia Mitchell-Kernan

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ABSTRACT

The psychological consequences of limited marital opportunity received attention with the publication of *Too Many Women* (Guttentag &Secord, 1983). They argued that American women were facing a shortage of potential partners and that this situation was associated with a range of social phenomena, including changes in the value of marriage and family. They theorized that more depression among women would also result, since many would be unable to fulfill expected societal roles (i.e., wife, mother) and their power in relationships would be diminished. Some examinations of the macrolevel formulations exist, but the psychological notions have not been tested. This paper addresses the relationship between perceived marital opportunity and psychological well-being, as measured by depression, anxiety, loneliness, life satisfaction, and relationship satisfaction, using women's data from the 1989 Southern California Social Survey. Partial correlations between the mate availability and well-being indicators, controlling for age, income, education and valued placed on marriage, demonstrate that perceptions of mate availability are significantly and negatively correlated with well-being. A perceived lack of availability is associated with greater depression, anxiety, loneliness, and less satisfaction with life. The effect is strong and pervasive for Latinas and White women, but somewhat weak for Black women. The correlation findings were supported by multiple regression analyses. Findings were interpreted as indicating that when the perception of mate availability is viewed as individually rooted and driven (an internal attribution), as was the case with both Latinas and White women, the consequences for psychological well-being are negative. When mate availability is viewed as a systemic feature of the environment over which one has little control (an external attribution), as was the case for Black women, mental health will not be affected.

Psychological Well-being and Perceived Marital Opportunity

The question of the psychological consequences of limited marital opportunity first received popular attention with the publication of *Too Many Women* by Marcia Guttentag and Paul Secord (1983). They argued that American women of marital age were facing a shortage of potential partners and that this situation was, at least in part, responsible for a range of phenomena currently observed in American society. Based on their examination of an array of historical, sociological, anthropological and literary material, Guttentag and Secord argued that male shortages throughout time have been accompanied by higher rates of singlehood, divorce, out-of-wedlock births, adultery, and transient relationships; less commitment among men to relationships; lower societal value on marriage and the family and a rise in feminism. Using a social exchange theoretical framework, they speculated that under conditions of low sex ratio (i.e., fewer men) women's "dyadic power" was diminished, resulting in less control over their romantic involvements. Such a situation could result in more depression, especially since a significant number of women will be unable to fulfill expected societal roles (i.e., wife, mother).

Although some examinations of the Guttentag and Secord (1983) macrolevel formulations have been conducted (Darity and Myers, 1983; Kiecolt & Fossett, 1989; South, 1988; South & Messner, 1986; Tucker, 1987), tests of the psychological notions are not to be found. Are personal assessments of dating and marital opportunities related to psychological well-being? Specifically, this paper addresses the relationship between perceived mate availability and psychological well-being, as measured by depression, anxiety, loneliness and life satisfaction.

Basic Conceptualizations

Our research program takes the societal phenomenon of sex ratio imbalance as context, but focuses on the social psychological impact of perceived mate availability. We view marital opportunity as the social meaning of sex ratio and incorporate the concept of

perceived mate availability as a central indicator of perceived marital opportunity (Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, in press). As we have indicated in earlier work, however, the concept of mate availability goes beyond the simple existence of "warm bodies" and includes notions of desirability, eligibility, and social constraints (e.g., racial boundaries). For example, the theoretical formulations of Darity and Myers (1984, 1986/87) and Wilson and Neckerman (1986) suggest that the lack of economic wherewithal of significant segments of the African-American male population has resulted in constrained marital opportunities for Black women. Our own analysis of marital behavior using data from the National Survey of Black Americans and the 1989 Southern California Social Survey provides support for these notions (Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1989; Tucker & Taylor, 1989).

Over the last three decades, there has been a fairly substantial focus on the relationship between marital status and well-being, with a seemingly consistent demonstration of a positive association between being married and positive socio-emotional states (Ensel, 1982; Gove & Tudor, 1973; Gurin, Veroff & Feld, 1960; Pearlin & Johnson, 1977). More recent studies have determined that it is the quality of marital relationships, rather than marriage per se, that relate to mental well-being (Gove, Hughes, & Style, 1983; Ensel, 1986). That is, to the extent that marriage serves as a source of social support, it may serve to buffer the relationship between stress and illness.

Although previous research has not focused on the relationship between well-being and the marital opportunity, we might theorize on the basis of the marital status literature, that a societal expectation that marriage will be a supportive mechanism is widespread. The belief that such support will not be forthcoming may contribute to negative well-being. Role theory would also suggest because there exists a widely held societal expectation that one will marry and have children, those who share this value, but see the possibility of realization as remote will experience more negative emotional outcomes.

The relationship between perceived marital opportunity and well-being, on an individual level, however, is likely to be mediated by both structural variables and the value placed on marriage and/or relationship formation. That is, because many older women place less emphasis on marriage and romantic involvement (Tucker & Taylor, 1989), emotional outlook for them would not be so dependent on dating and marriage opportunities. The availability of personal resources, such as higher education and income, should also lessen the dependence on relationship formation for emotional well-being. Also, to the extent that women differ in the value placed on the roles of wife and mother, they should be differentially influenced by constraints on opportunities to fulfill such roles. (Although, it could also be argued that marital and familial values are influenced by perceived mate availability; and that women who perceive their opportunities as severely constrained may begin to devalue the importance of being married.) This study,then, addresses the relationship between mate availability and well-being while controlling for the influence of age, education, income and the perceived value of marriage.

Method

Sample

Half of the contents of the 1989 Southern California Social Survey (SCSS) was devoted to the issue of mate availability and its attitudinal and psychological correlates by virtue of the primary author's role as the 1989 SCSS Principal Investigator. Conducted in February and March of 1989, the sample consisted of 1,116 adult (age 18 and over) residents of Los Angeles, Ventura and Orange counties. Blacks and Latinos were oversampled by a factor of 13 to 1, in order to provide numbers of numbers sufficient for analytical purposes. Although 5% of the sample was of Asian origin and another 3.6% represented "other" ethnic/racial groups or combinations of groups, the present analyses will focus only on Blacks, Whites, and Latinos. Two-thirds of the Latino sample were Mexican-American, with the remaining primarily of Central and South American ancestry.

These analyses were also limited to the approximately 300 single women in the three ethnic groups who had complete data on the set of variables used in these analyses.

Since the sex ratios of the major ethnic groups in Los Angeles vary greatly (Tucker, 1987), we expected and found substantial variability in individual perceptions of mate availability, which were relatively accurate reflections of the 1980 Census figures (Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1989).

Procedure

Telephone interviews were conducted using the UCLA Institute for Social Science Research Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) system. A simple random-digit-dialed sample was generated for the area codes and prefixes in the survey region.

The three questions used as indicators of perceived mate availability in this paper are listed in Appendix A and summarized here as 1) **availability of opposite sex**: for women/men like yourself, are there not enough, enough, or more than enough men/women; 2) **expectations of marriage**: how likely do you think it is that you will ever marry/remarry; and 3) **date availability**: how easy is it for you to find dates who meet your standards these days.

Indicators of well-being included the short version of the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression (CES-D) scale (Ross, Moralski, & Haber, 1983), the 4-item survey version of the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, Peplau, & Cutrona, 1980), psychological anxiety (Veroff, Douvan & Kulka, 1981), and a one-item life satisfaction indicator commonly used in social surveys (Gurin, Veroff & Feld, 1960). Control variables included age, educational level (a five point measure), and income level of neighborhood (poor, working class, middle class, upper-middle class, and wealthy). Two other items relating to marital values were also included. On the basis of factor analysis, two measures of marital values were extracted from a series of questions on the factors the respondent considered most important for a successful marriage: value placed on romantic aspects of marriage (i.e., love, life-long commitment, and fidelity) and value placed on

background characteristics (social background, religion, and race/ethnicity). Previous analyses indicate that, relative to single women, Black and Latina women who do marry place greater emphasis on the romantic aspects of marriage and that Black married women also place greater emphasis on background characteristics. Also, based on theories of the economic factors associated with Black marital behavior, an item on the value of sufficient income for marital success was also included.

Multiple regression analyses were used assess predictions of well-being from mate availability, controlling for age, income, education and value placed on marriage.

Results

Partial correlations between the mate availability and well-being indicators, controlling for age, income, education and valued placed on marriage, demonstrate that perceptions of mate availability are significantly and negatively correlated with well-being. A perceived lack of availability is associated with greater depression, anxiety, loneliness, and less satisfaction with life. The effect is strong and pervasive for Latinas and White women, but somewhat weak for Black women. Depression is strongly related to perceived mate availability among both Latinas and White women, but related rather modestly only to expectations of marriage among Black women. Date availability and perceived availability of the opposite sex were most consistently associated with well-being, with expectations of marriage related only in the case of Black women and depression.

Multiple regression analyses support the correlation findings. Date availability, in particular was a significant predictor for all four indicators of well-being among White women, and related to depression and loneliness among Latinas. In no case was mate availability a contributor to well-being among Black women. The extent to which romance was valued in marriage was also a significant predictor of depression for Latinas and Whites and differentially by ethnicity for other well-being indicators. A belief in the

importance of income for a successful marriage, however, was predictive of both anxiety and loneliness for Black women.

Conclusions

The findings suggest that considerations of mate availability do play an important role in psychological well-being for Latinas and White women. Women who felt that their dating opportunities were constrained and those who felt that there were not enough available men for them, were more likely to be depressed, anxious, lonely and less satisfied with life. The absence of a relationship for black women is notable, particularly in view of the fact that this research program was initiated by our interest in the psychological consequences of a shortage of men in the African American population (Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, in press b). We believe that the difference is a function of the pervasive nature of the perceived "male shortage" among Blacks. As we have previously demonstrated in other analyses of these data (Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1989), both Black women and men hold extreme views of sex-ratio imbalance among Blacks, with both sexes perceiving an extreme shortage of men. Such a pervasive perception allows Black women to see the lack of opportunities for dating and the unavailability of men as *systemically* rooted. There is no sex ratio imbalance among Latinos in Southern California and, although there are fewer White men than women, the imbalance is not nearly as extreme as that observed among Blacks. Furthermore, the mate availability perceptions held by Latinos and Whites reflect this distinction (Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan, 1989). Latinas and White women would therefore be more likely to see mate availability as both individually rooted and driven--thereby having greater consequences for mental health.

The fact that expectation of marriage was, for the most part, unrelated to psychological well-being, was unexpected (given that we controlled for the degree to which the respondent personally valued being married). Unlike dating experiences and the "objective" assessment of the availability of the opposite sex, the relationship between well-being and marital expectancies may be indirect, and more dependent on the quality of

experiences with men. One could have an easy time getting dates, but come away feeling that marriage is just not for you, given the quality of the interactions with the men dated.

Table 1

Partial Correlations Between Mate Availability and Well-Being Indicators

Controlling for Age, Income, Education and Value of Marriage

	Depression	Anxiety	Loneliness	Life Satisfaction
BLACK WOMEN				
Date Availability	-.08	-.16*	-.07	.02
Avail. of Opposite Sex	-.08	-.11	-.03	-.12+
Expectations of Marriage	-.13+	-.05	-.09	.11
LATINAS				
Date Availability	-.28*	-.08	-.25+	-.16
Avail. of Opposite Sex	-.44**	-.31*	-.01	-.35**
Expectations of Marriage	.00	-.05	.03	-.02
WHITE WOMEN				
Date Availability	-.25**	-.14+	-.28**	-.29**
Avail. of Opposite Sex	-.18*	-.17*	-.26**	-.08
Expectations of Marriage	-.03	.08	-.09	-.03

**p<.01; *p<.05;+p<.10.

Table 2

Results of Multiple Regression Analyses for Depression

	Blacks (n=134)		Latinas (n=57)		Whites (n=119)	
Variables	b	Beta	b	Beta	b	Beta
Expectation of marriage	-0.79	-0.16	-0.63	-0.10	0.25	0.05
Date availability	-0.24	-0.05	-1.98	-0.28**	-1.37	-0.24**
Availability of Opp. Sex	-1.81	0.10	-10.24	-0.30**	-2.17	-0.08
Value romance in marriage	-0.33	-0.06	-1.32	-0.33**	-1.57	-0.24**
Value background in marriage	-0.10	-0.03	0.15	0.05	-0.40	-0.14
Import of income in marriage	+1.18	0.10	+1.69	0.16	0.11	0.01
Age	-0.12	-0.14	-0.36	-0.31*	-0.01	-0.01
Education	-2.60	-0.19**	-2.99	-0.18	-2.35	-0.19**
Income	-1.15	-0.05	-6.14	-0.20	-0.19	-0.01
Value of marriage	0.40	0.08	0.76	0.13	0.31	0.06
R^2	.09		.42		.18	
Adjusted R^2	.02		.30		.10	

***p<.01;**p<.05;*P<.10.

Table 3

Results of Multiple Regression Analyses for Anxiety

	Blacks (n=134)		Latinas (n=57)		Whites (n=119)	
Variables	b	Beta	b	Beta	b	Beta
Expectation of marriage	-0.05	-0.07	-0.15	-0.18	0.25	.+05
Date availability	-0.10	-0.13	-0.00	-0.00	-1.37	-0.24**
Availability of Opp. Sex	-0.28	-0.07	-1.48	-0.32*	-2.17	-0.08
Value romance in marriage	0.03	0.03	-0.01	-0.01	-1.57	-0.24**
Value background in marriage	-0.02	-0.04	-0.01	-0.01	-0.40	-0.14
Import of income in marriage	0.26	0.16*	-0.02	-0.01	0.11	0.01
Age	-0.02	-0.13	-0.06	-0.40	-0.01	-0.01
Education	-0.30	-0.15	-0.44	-0.19	-2.35	-0.19**
Income	-0.21	-0.06	-0.75	-0.18	-0.19	-0.01
Value of marriage	-0.04	0.11	0.06	0.08	0.31	0.06
R	.31		.44		.42	
R^2	.09		.19		.18	
Adjusted R^2	.02		.01		.10	

***p<.01;**p<.05;*P<.10.

Table 4

Results of Multiple Regression Analyses for Loneliness

	Blacks (n=134)		Latinas (n=57)		Whites (n=119)	
Variables	b	Beta	b	Beta	b	Beta
Expectation of marriage	-0.09	-0.12	-0.15	-0.22	-0.01	-0.02
Date availability	-0.04	-0.05	-0.23	-0.29**	-0.15	-0.19*
Availability of Opp. Sex	-0.08	-0.02	0.15	0.04	-0.70	-0.20*
Value romance in marriage	0.06	0.08	-0.14	-0.30**	0.06	0.07
Value background in marriage	-0.01	-0.03	-0.02	-0.07	0.01	0.01
Import of income in marriage	0.28	0.17*	0.05	0.04	-0.20	-0.17
Age	-0.00	-0.02	-0.08	-0.58***	-0.01	-0.05
Education	-0.58	-0.29***	-0.15	-0.08	-0.20	-0.12
Income	-0.32	-0.09	-0.08	-0.02	-0.12	-0.04
Value of marriage	-0.00	-0.00	-0.09	-0.14	0.04	0.06
R	.40		.58		.39	
R^2	.16		.34		.15	
Adjusted R^2	.09		.19		.07	

***p<.01;**p<.05;*P<.10.

Table 5

Results of Multiple Regression Analyses for Life Satisfaction

	Blacks (n=134)		Latinas (n=57)		Whites (n=119)	
Variables	b	Beta	b	Beta	b	Beta
Expectation of marriage	0.02	0.10	0.01	0.05	0.01	0.03
Date availability	0.00	0.01	-0.02	-0.06	-0.08	-0.32**
Availability of Opp. Sex	-0.11	-0.11	-0.26	-0.21	0.04	0.04
Value romance in marriage	0.01	0.07	0.01	0.10	-0.05	-0.19
Value background in marriage	0.01	0.05	-0.00	-0.04	-0.02	-0.12
Import of income in marriage	0.07	0.15	0.06	0.16	0.02	0.06
Age	-0.00	-0.09	-0.02	-0.41**	-0.01	-0.18
Education	0.03	0.06	-0.13	-0.21	-0.03	-0.06
Income	-0.04	-0.04	-0.21	-0.19	-0.10	-0.11
Value of marriage	0.03	0.15	-0.05	-0.22	.01	0.04
R	.32		.53		.41	
R^2	.10		.28		.17	
Adjusted R^2	.03		.12		.08	

***p<.01;**p<.05;*P<.10.

References

Darity, W., & and Myers, S. L. (1983). Changes in Black family structure; Implications for welfare dependency. American Economic Review, 73, 59-64.

Darity, W., & and Myers, S. L. (1986/87). Public policy trends and the fate of the black family." Humboldt Journal of Social Relations, 14, 134-164.

Darity, W., & and Myers, S. L. (1984). Public policy and the conditions of Black family life. Review of the Black Political Economy, 14, 165-187.

Ensel, W. M. (1982). The role of age in the relationship of gender and marital status to depression. Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease, 170, 536-543.

Ensel, W. M. (1986). Sex, marital status, and depression: The role of life events and social support. In N. Lin, W. M. Ensel, & A. Dean (Ed.). Social support, life events, and depression. Orlando, FL: Academic Press.

Gove, W. R., Hughes, M., & Style, C. B. (1983). Does marriage have positive effects on the psychological well-being of the individual. Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 24, 122-131.

Gove, W. R., & Tudor, J. (1973). Adult sex roles and mental illness. American Journal of Sociology, 77, 812-835.

Gurin, G., Veroff, J., & Feld, S. (1960). Americans view their mental health. New York: Basic Books.

Guttentag, M, & Secord, P. F. (1983). Too Many Women: The sex ratio question. Beverly Hills: Sage.

Kiecolt, K. J., & Fossett, M. A., Mate availability and marital outcomes among African Americans: Aggregate and Individual Level Analyses. Paper presented at the conference, "The Decline in Marriage Among African-Americans: Causes, Consequences and Policy Implications," June 30-July 1, 1989, Center for Afro-American Studies, University of California, Los Angeles.

Pearlin, L., & Johnson, J. S. (1977). Marital status, life strains, and depression. American Sociological Review, 42, 704-715.

Ross, Moralski, & Haber (1983). Marriage patterns and depression. American Sociological Review, 48, 809-823.

Russell, D., Peplau, L. A., & Cutrona, C. E. (1980). The revised UCLA Loneliness scale: Concurrent and discriminant validity evidence. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 39, 472-480.

South, S. J. (1986). Sex ratios, economic power, and women's roles: A theoretical extension and empirical test. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 50, 19-31.

South, S. J. & Messner, S. F. (1988). The sex ratio and women's involvement in crime: A cross-national analysis. The Sociological Quarterly, 28, 171-188.

Tucker, M. B. (1987). The black male shortage in Los Angeles. Sociology and Social Research, 71, 221-227.

Tucker, M. B. & Mitchell-Kernan, C. (1989). Marital behavior and expectations: Attitudinal and structural correlates. Paper presented at the conference, "The Decline in Marriage Among African-Americans: Causes, Consequences and Policy Implications," June 30-July 1, 1989, Center for Afro-American Studies, University of California, Los Angeles.

Tucker, M. B. & Mitchell-Kernan, C. (In press). Sex ratio imbalance and Afro-Americans: Conceptual and methodological issues. In R. Jones (ed.), Advances in black psychology. Berkeley, CA: Cobb and Henry.

Tucker, M. B., & Taylor, R. J. (1989). Demographic correlates of relationship status among Black Americans. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 51,

Veroff, J., Douvan, E., & Kulka, R. (1981). The inner American: A self-portrait from 1957 to 1976. New York: Basic Books.

Wilson, W. J. & Neckerman, K. M. (1986). Poverty and family structure: The widening gap between evidence and public policy issues. In S. H. Danziger and D. H. Weinberg (eds.), Fighting poverty: What works and what doesn't. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

APPENDIX A

Selected Measures used in Marriage and Family Subcomponent of the 1989 Southern California Social Survey

Marital Values and Expectations

1. Using the same scale of 1 to 10, with 10 meaning extremely important and 1 meaning not important at all, how important is being married to you?

2 Using the scale of 1 to 10 again, how important do you think each of the following is for a successful marriage?

DERIVED FACTORS:

I. Importance of Romantic Values for Marriage: items 2a, 2b, 2c

a. love
b. being faithful (that is, not cheating on your partner by seeing other persons)
c. making a life-long commitment

II. Importance of Background Characteristics for Marriage: items 2e, 2f, 2g

e. being the same race or ethnic group
f. coming from similar social or cultural backgrounds
g. being of the same religion

Mate Availability

3. Now I would like you to tell me what your current dating situation is like. On a scale of 1 to 10, please tell me how easy is it for you to find dates who meet your standards these days. 10 means that you have a very easy time finding suitable dates and 1 means you have an extremely difficult time finding suitable dates.

4. For women/men like yourself, that is, women/men about your age with a similar educational and social background, would you say that there are:

a. **not enough** men/women
b. **enough** men/women
c. **more than enough** men/women

5. On a scale of 1 to 10, how likely do you think it is that you will *ever* marry/remarry? 10 is extremely likely and 1 is very *un*likely.

Income/Economic Level

6. What kind of people mainly ive in your neighborhood? Would you say...1) mostly very poor, 2) mostly working class, 3) mostly middle class, 4) mostly upper middle class, or 5) mostly wealthy people?